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SUBJECT: FRENCH ON JANUARY 31 GAERC

REF: STATE 09678

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Paul Mailhot for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche points to MFA CFSP deputy Pascal LeDeunff on Jan. 18 and followed in conversation with LeDeunff Jan 28. LeDeunff noted that the French are awaiting "with enthusiasm" the visits to Europe of both President Bush and Secretary Rice. With regard to the President's February 22 visit to the EU, LeDeunff noted that the PolDirs had discussed the agenda with Assistant Secretary Jones during her Jan 17-18 meetings in Luxembourg. He noted that the Europeans in general and the French in particular are looking forward to the opportunity to relaunch a dialogue with the United States to find a resolution to the crises in Iraq and the Middle East.

2. (C) LeDeunff stated that no action will be taken on the China arms embargo, the toolbox, or the Code of Conduct before the President's visit. "Discussion" on this issue, he said, "is frozen" for now.

3. (C) On Ukraine, LeDeunff said that the conclusions that would emerge from the GAERC will be very general in nature. He notes that the discussion is just beginning on what the EU will do with regard to Ukraine. The French, he said, want to keep Ukraine within the "neighborhood" framework agreed at The Hague in December. He noted that he envisioned other member states pushing for more for Ukraine, but said the French are firm in their position.

4. (C) LeDeunff said the ministers will be considering "adaptations" to the EU's Cuba policy at the GAERC, insisting that the US and the EU have the same objectives in Cuba --- the liberation of political prisoners, respect for human rights -- but view differently the best means of achieving those goals. "We like to use the carrot," he said, "you like the stick." He asserted that even the mention of changes to the European Cuba policy had resulted in the release of some prisoners. He underlined that there is a broad European consensus on Cuba policy.

5. (C) Hizbollah will not be discussed at the GAERC, LeDeunff said, but he emphasized that the Middle East and Iraq will be important topics. The ministers will discuss the planned March 1 Palestinian reform meeting in London, and he said, as part of the upcoming American visits, the French will seek EU pressure on the USG to open the second phase of the road map and hold the international conference on final status. "There is a favorable climate now," he said, "and we must act as quickly as possible. We are going to urge the US to engage itself." LeDeunff also said that the Europeans were likely to call on Lebanon and Syria to implement UNSCR 1559, emphasizing especially the obligation to disarm.

6. (C) On Iraq, LeDeunff noted that the GAERC will provide the first opportunity for the EU to offer its view on the just-completed Iraqi elections. He noted that while he could not prejudge the EU statement before the elections, his sense is that it will be very near to the US message- that an important step has been taken with the holding of elections, and that the EU is ready to support democratic and economic progress in Iraq.
Leach